



NOTE TO OUR READERS

My Friend Bennett and the Healing Power of the Outdoors

ays may go by when my calendar reflects only meetings and other responsibilities that keep me indoors, so I relish those days when the job takes me outdoors. Almost immediately, I notice the difference:

my mood lifts, my shoulders relax, I breathe more deeply, and I simply feel better. According to a study released last month, I'm not alone in appreciating the outdoors. Nearly 75 percent of adults agree that getting into nature is important for one's physical health and emotional outlook.

Such was the case during this year's opening day of trout season at Bennett Spring State Park. Being a part of opening day is definitely a perk of the job, but the pinnacle of this day was the release of a rehabilitated immature bald eagle. This gorgeous young eagle, named Bennett by his caretakers at World Bird Sanctuary (WBS), had been hit by a vehicle, but was now ready to return to the wild.

WBS staff instructed me on how to hold this majestic raptor so that both of us survived the release uninjured. I held Bennett snuggly against me, my arms cradling his wings, and my hands securing his legs so that he could not use his talons against me. My heart was racing, as I'm sure his was as well. As the crowd counted down, I launched him up and out to freedom.

Bennett has stayed close to the park, given its steady supply of trout. He's not alone. The area is so attractive to birds it is included in the Great Missouri Birding Trail, an online resource that identifies the state's best birding sites (see *The Great Missouri Birding Trail Takes Flight*, Page 10).

I recognize we can't all release an eagle to the wild, but we can all experience the positive effects of time outdoors. Our Missouri outdoors is calling, ready and willing to reinvigorate and inspire us. So let's turn off the devices, my friends, and head to healing waters.



Above: Joe Hoffmann, director of rehabilitation and rescue at WBS, **Director Sara Parker Pauley, Conservation Commissioner Marilynn** Bradford, and WBS **Executive Director Brian Bissonnette** take a moment with Bennett the bald eagle before he's released back into the wild at Bennett Spring State Park (right).



—Sara Parker Pauley, director

FEATURES

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by Kristie Hilgedick

A new online resource features the state's best birding spots

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by Wyatt Layman
Learning to coexist with bears is a rewarding challenge

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by Kristie Hilgedick

Missourians with disabilities go afield with adaptive gear and a little help from their friends

Cover: A male blue grosbeak in spring, photographed by Noppadol Paothong. You can spot cool birds like this one by checking out the Great Missouri Birding Trail. Learn more on Page 10.

600mm lens + 1.4x teleconverter • f/7.1 1/1250 sec • ISO 500

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Our photographers have been busy exploring the intricacies of outdoor Missouri. See if you can guess this month's natural wonder. The answer is revealed on Page 7.



TOWER GROVE PARK

I was so happy to see the article on my favorite park in the city [Tower Grove Park; March; Page 16]. When we lived in the neighborhood, I used to speed walk in the park every morning. There was always something new and interesting to encounter — a new bird song, a tree I hadn't noticed before, or an opossum on the walking path, blindly wandering toward me.

Even though we moved out of the neighborhood and I can no longer walk well, I still go to the park often to visit favorite trees and listen to the birds sing. It's truly a gem in the city and always in my heart.

Kelli Tovar, via email

I really enjoyed your story on Tower Grove Park. I have been there many times and am awed by the most beautiful birds, landscapes, dazzling architecture, and ponds. My children have also

gone to this park because it is too beautiful not to share. This is one of my favorite parks in St. Louis, even though it's guite a trip out from Franklin County. But it's totally worth it. Thank you for the great articles!

Eunice Fields, New Haven

I enjoyed your story on Tower Grove Park, especially the pictures of the birds. I wish I lived close to the park. Please give us more on the birds in Missouri and where they can be found. Thanks, Danny Brown. Great job!

Jo O'Connell, St. Charles

Thanks for the walk down memory lane with Tower Grove Park. As a child I would take the Bates bus to the end of the line then walk to the middle of the park to the wading pool with a big fountain in the middle. It was so fun.

Dorothy Hittner, St. Louis

As a longtime birder, I'd like to praise Danny Brown for his excellent feature and superb photographs of native birds found in Tower Grove Park. Also regarding the *Conservationist* editorial staff, they deserve praise for adhering to traditionally good English by not capitalizing common names of the birds mentioned in the article. Case in point, the American robin by any other name is best known as a robin.

James P. Jackson, Washington

APP-RECIATION

Congrats, MDC, on the app. I enjoy using it, the historical data, and convenience. Works great! Andrew Hood, Blue Springs

It was easy to renew my hunting and fishing licenses on the app. I'm glad it was an option. Leland P. Hawk, via Facebook

Editors' note: The MO Hunting and MO Fishing apps, available for Android and iPhone, allow hunters and anglers to purchase and view permits on their mobile device. For more information, visit short.mdc.mo.gov/ZwP



Wildfire

Thank you for the story in the March issue, Answering the Call [Page 24]. I never realized how much training and hard work went into controlling and preventing fires. I lived in the country before moving to town and learned how guickly fires from trash get out of hand. Keep up the good work.

Mary Bryan, Franklin City

JANUARY ISSUE

Well you finally outdid yourselves. I'm referring to the January 2017 issue. It was informative, encouraging, and enlightening. Continue to march on! One thing I would like to see you do is encourage the Boy and Girl Scouts. In so many ways, they are your future. Life is not as easy today for the Scouts as it was when I was a Scout in the 1930s and 1940s.

William F. Lewis, Edina



Reader Photo

A WHOLE NEW WORLD

Erin Volker captured this photo of a fledgling robin in her Springfield backyard, where she sees a lot of birds. "It is always exciting when a new species shows up," said Volker. "I try to learn new species as much as possible. I really try to listen even more than looking. I can tell when the cardinals are out, even from inside the house, when I hear their 'peter peters." Volker describes herself as a nature lover and says her family loves floating Missouri's Ozark streams. When she isn't taking pictures, Volker enjoys doing artwork.



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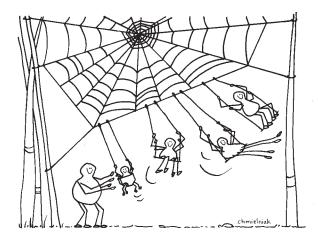
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Agent Notes

Sharing the Experience of the Outdoors

AT A VERY young age, I was taught not only to enjoy, but also respect, the outdoors and natural resources we are so fortunate to have in Missouri.



Whether I was on my first deer hunt with my father, fishing, or just taking in the view, I enjoyed being outside. As conservationists, it is our responsibility to share these experiences so others can learn about and respect the resources we have.

When I make contact with people, I enjoy hearing about outdoor experiences they will never forget. I also look forward to sharing many outdoor activities and experiences with my children, as generations before have done for me. I encourage you to take the opportunity to share your outdoor experiences with others. You may not realize how much of an impact you have. By sharing outdoor experiences, we all do our part to protect and manage our fish, forest, and wildlife resources.

Mark McNeely is the conservation agent for DeKalb County. If you would like to contact the agent for your county, phone your regional conservation office listed on Page 3.

Operation Game Thief

Help put game thieves out of business. If you see a possible violation in progress, call your county conservation agent immediately or dial the toll-free number **800-392-1111**.

All information is kept in strict confidence. Desirable information includes names of violators, vehicle description and license number, as well as the violation location.

HUNTING & FISHING CALENDAR

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FISHING	OPEN	CLOSE
Black Bass		
Impounded waters and most streams north of the Missouri River	All year	None
Most streams south of the Missouri River	05/27/17	02/28/18
Bullfrogs and Green Frogs	06/30/17	10/31/17
	at sunset	
Nongame Fish Gigging		
Impounded Waters		
sunrise to sunset	02/01/17	09/14/17
Streams and Impounded Waters		
sunrise to midnight	09/15/17	01/31/18
Paddlefish		
Mississippi River	03/15/17	05/15/17
	09/15/17	12/15/17
Trout Parks	, ,	, .
Catch-and-Keep	03/01/17	10/31/17
Catch-and-Release	11/10/17	02/12/18
HUNTING	OPEN	CLOSE
Bullfrogs and Green Frogs	06/30/17 at sunset	10/31/17
Coyote (restrictions apply during April,	All year	None
spring turkey season, and firearms		
deer season)		
Deer		
Archery	09/15/17	11/10/17
_	11/22/17	01/15/18
Firearms		
Early Youth Portion	10/28/17	10/29/17
November Portion	11/11/17	11/21/17
Late Youth Portion	11/24/17	11/26/17
Antlerless Portion (open areas only)	12/01/17	12/03/17
Alternative Methods Portion	12/23/17	01/02/18
Groundhog (woodchuck)	05/08/17	12/15/17
Pheasant	10/20/-	10/25/5-
Youth	10/28/17	10/29/17
Regular Quail	11/01/17	01/15/18
Youth	10/28/17	10/20/17
Regular	10/28/1/ 11/01/17	10/29/17 01/15/18
Rabbit	11/01/1/	01/15/18
Squirrel	05/27/17	02/15/18
Turkey	03/2//1/	02/13/10
Archery	09/15/17	11/10/17
Alcalety	11/22/17	01/15/18
Firearms	11/22/1/	01/15/10
Spring	04/17/17	05/07/17
Fall	10/01/17	10/31/17
Waterfowl see the Waterfowl Hun		

For complete information about seasons, limits, methods, and restrictions, consult the Wildlife Code of Missouri and the current summaries of Missouri Hunting and Trapping Regulations and Missouri Fishing Regulations, The Spring Turkey Hunting Regulations and Information, the Fall Deer & Turkey Hunting Regulations and Information, the Waterfowl Hunting Digest, and the Migratory Bird Hunting Digest. For more information, visit short.mdc.mo.gov/ZZf or permit vendors.

Ask MDC

Address: PO Box 180, Jefferson City, MO 65102-0180 Phone: 573-522-4115, ext. 3848 Email: AskMDC@mdc.mo.gov



When do wood ducks hatch in Missouri?

Nesting occurs between April and the end of June, making early May a good time to watch for ducklings.

Wood ducks build their nests in trees near water. New ducklings need a lot of protein to grow and develop feathers, so they can be found gathering insects around moist soil or shallow water with sparse vegetation.

The wood duck is the only North American duck that commonly produces two broods in one breeding season. For more information, visit **allaboutbirds.org**.

How often do you see a doe with triplets?

"Triplets are not common in most Missouri counties today," said Kevyn Wiskirchen, MDC resource scientist. "Although mature female deer are capable of producing three or even four fawns, reproductive potential is closely linked to body condition, which is linked to available nutrition."

Currently in Missouri, deer populations are generally at or slightly below the land's biological carrying capacity, a phrase that describes when deer numbers are in balance with available habitat and animals are in good condition.

In areas where forage is extremely nutritious and plentiful, the likelihood of triplets (and the very rare occurrence of quadruplets) increases. In one Michigan deer herd fed supplemental rations, 14 percent of the mature does had triplets at least once in a several-year period, a rate higher than most free-ranging populations.

Conversely, in areas where nutrition is limited, single offspring are more common, and some does may not enter estrus

at all. Florida Key deer produce 1.2 fetuses per mature female, probably due to intense competition for limited resources.

Mother's Day through late June is a good time to watch for fawns.

Are swarms of honeybees dangerous? Should I be concerned if I see one?

Honeybees begin to swarm in early May, and the sight of a cloud of bees certainly can be alarming.

But don't be worried — swarming is just the natural method bees use to create new colonies. The swarming process happens when a colony becomes overpopulated and a portion of the worker bees no longer receive the queen's pheromone signals. These workers then create a new queen bee. Because there is only space for one queen in any colony, the old queen flies off with a part of the colony to establish a new nest before the new queen emerges.

Swarming bees fly in a cluster with the worker bees gathered around the queen. Because queen bees are not strong fliers, the swarm will sometimes temporarily pause to rest on tree branches, fence posts, picnic tables, etc. Meanwhile, scout bees — the most experienced foragers — search for suitable nesting sites.

Honeybees are usually not aggressive while swarming. Why? Without a brood or food stores to defend, the swarm's greater focus is finding a new nesting site for their queen.

Caution is still in order — swarming bees may be less likely to sting, but they will still defend themselves if they feel threatened.

Although honeybees are not native to North America, this species is known as the Missouri state insect. Colonists introduced the bees from Germany, and today wild populations occur throughout the state. Honeybees are the major pollinator of many field crops and almost all tree fruits, making it the world's most beneficial insect.

NEWS & EVENTS

by Joe Jerek



Squirrel, Black Bass Seasons Open Memorial Day Weekend

Memorial Day weekend is significant for squirrel hunters and black bass anglers in Missouri. The Saturday of Memorial Day weekend, May 27, marks the opening of both squirrel season statewide and catch-and-keep bass season in most streams south of the Missouri River.

SQUIRRELS

Hunters can pursue fox and gray squirrels from May 27 through Feb. 15, 2018, with rifles, shotguns, and other legal firearms methods, along with archery equipment, slingshots, or atlatls. The daily limit for hunting and trapping is 10, with a possession limit of 20. Valid permits for squirrel hunting include archery hunting, daily small game, small game hunting and fishing, and small game hunting.

Hunters with valid permits can also take squirrels with cage-type traps. Traps must be plainly labeled on a durable material with the user's full name and address or conservation number. Squirrel traps must have openings measuring 144 square inches or less, for instance, 12 inches by 12 inches. Hunters must tend to their traps daily. The same regulations apply to rabbits and groundhogs during their respective seasons.

For more information on squirrel hunting, check out the 2017 Summary of Missouri Hunting and Trapping Regulations, available where permits are sold or online at **short.mdc.mo.gov/Zwa**.

BLACK BASS

The black bass catch-and-keep season applies to most streams south of the Missouri River for largemouth, smallmouth, and spotted or Kentucky bass and runs from May 27 to Feb. 28, 2018. Anglers may catch these species legally all year, anywhere in the state. They may keep legal-sized bass caught from impoundments all year long, statewide. In most of the state's waters, the daily limit on black bass is six. Black bass taken from streams must be at least 12 inches long in most areas. Additional specific regulations may apply to specific waters or areas. Anglers must have a valid fishing permit or be exempt.

For more information on bass fishing, visit short.mdc.mo.gov/ZwR or check out the 2017 Summary of Missouri Fishing Regulations, available where permits are sold.

Get Hooked on Fishing

Get hooked on fishing with Free Fishing Days June 10 and 11. During this event, anyone can fish in the Show-Me State without purchasing a fishing permit, trout permit, or trout park daily tag. Normal regulations remain in effect, such as limits on size and number of fish an angler can keep. Special permits can still be required at some county, city, or private fishing areas. Trespass laws remain in effect on private property.

Conservation makes Missouri a great place to fish, and Free Fishing Days encourages people to sample the state's abundant fishing opportunities. Missouri has more than a million acres of surface water, and most of it provides great fishing. More than 200 different fish species are found in Missouri, with more than 20 of them being game fish for the state's more than 1.1 million anglers.

For information on Missouri fishing regulations, permit requirements, fish identification, and more, get a copy of 2017 Summary of Missouri Fishing Regulations where permits are sold or online at short.mdc.mo.gov/Zw9.

Auction in Salem

We will hold our next semi-annual public auction of used MDC vehicles and equipment June 10 at 10 a.m. at the Salem Maintenance Center, located at the junction of Highway 72 and Highway 32. The auction will include boats, outboard motors, tractors, dozers, farm equipment, vehicles, and more.

Cash, check, and credit/debit cards will be accepted. As required by state statute, MDC must charge a convenience fee to all customers who pay by credit or debit card.

Those interested can view auction items June 9 at the Salem Maintenance Center from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. with preregistration starting at 9 a.m. Registration the day of the sale begins at 7:30 a.m. A complete lot listing and terms of sales will be available at the registration desk the day of the auction. A list of auction items will be available online the week before the auction at mdc.mo.gov/auction.



Find Places to Discover Nature

Does spring fever have you itching to get outside? Do you enjoy hiking, biking, hunting, fishing, photography, shooting sports, wildlife watching, or other outdoor activities? Let the MDC website help you find Places to Go to discover nature on our more than 1,000 conservation areas, accesses, shooting ranges, nature centers, and more all around the Show-Me State. Visit short.mdc.mo.gov/Z4V and search by activity, facility, natural feature, city, county, zip code, or specific area. See our featured Places to Go - Wah'Kon-Tah Prairie — in this issue on Page 32.



Checkered Madtom | *Notorus flavater*

The checkered madtom is a moderately small catfish with a yellowish back and four prominent black crossbars down the length of its body. Its upper jaw protrudes beyond its lower jaw, revealing saw-like teeth. The checkered madtom can reach 6.7 inches in length, and is found in the southern Ozarks from the upper White River east to the Current River. It is less abundant than other madtoms and seems to be declining in the White River system. Little is known about the habits and life history of this fish. Like other madtoms, it is secretive and nocturnal, remaining under cover in the daytime and actively searching the bottoms for food at night. —photograph by Jim Rathert



Wild Webcast: Missouri Birds and Birding

Join our Wild Webcast: Missouri Birds and Birding May 10 from 1–2 p.m. to learn about:

- >> Common birds found in Missouri
- >>> Building bird habitat in backyards and on big acreage
- Birding for beginners
- >> The Great Missouri Birding Trail, and more

MDC staff with personal and professional expertise with birds and birding will provide a brief presentation and then answer questions from webcast participants. Register at short.mdc.mo.gov/Zwy.

Watch previous MDC Wild Webcasts on Talking Hogs, The Buzz About Pollinators, Be Bear Aware, The Fight Against Chronic Wasting Disease, and Discover Nature — Fishing at short.mdc.mo.gov/ZwE. MDC will also offer Wild Webcasts on mountain lions in September and invasive species in November.

Plant for Pollinators

May brings to mind Mother's Day for many, and flowers are a popular gift. Give the gift of native flowers this May by planting native flowering plants. Whether you have a small urban lot or balcony, a suburban yard or rural acreage, you can include native plants in your landscape. Various types thrive in sun, shade, wet, or dry conditions.

Missouri's wide variety of native plants creates beauty and interest with their foliage, flowers, and fruits. They also furnish food and cover for important pollinators, such as butterflies, bees, birds, and other wildlife. Native plants make gardening easier because they are adapted to our

climate and soils, require little or no extra watering, and seldom require fertilizer or pesticides.

Get tips, types, information, and instructions from the free MDC publication Native Plants for Your Landscape available



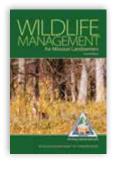
online at short.mdc.mo.gov/ZoZ, by emailing a request to pubstaff@mdc.mo.gov, or by calling 573-751-4115, ext. 3630.

Wildlife Management for Missouri Landowners

This free booklet provides new and updated information on wildlife habitat needs and improved habitat management techniques for grasslands, native prairies, wetlands, uplands, forests, woodlands, and savannas.

Private landowners in Missouri are responsible for the care and management of over 90 percent of land in the state. The continued survival of Missouri's fish, forests, and wildlife — and their habitats — depend on conservation stewardship by private landowners. This publication is a landowner's and land manager's guide to imple-

menting quality land management practices that will protect and conserve these valuable resources. Request a copy by emailing pubstaff@mdc.mo.gov or by calling 573-751-4115, ext. 3630.





Don't Move Firewood

Most insect pests emerge from firewood during warm months, and moving firewood to new locations — such as from home to a campsite — can easily spread invasive pests to new areas. Insects and diseases can be very hard to detect in firewood because they are often concealed under bark. Even seasoned wood with no signs of bugs, holes, or sawdust can harbor insect eggs or fungal spores capable of starting a new infestation that destroys trees, decreases property values, and costs a lot of money to manage.

Pests that pose the biggest threat to Missouri forests include the emerald ash borer, Asian longhorned beetle, gypsy moth, and thousand cankers disease for black walnut.

Missouri is under a statewide guarantine that restricts the movement of hardwood firewood out of the state as well as the importation of hardwood firewood from some states. Firewood is legal to move within the state, but tree-health experts strongly recommend not moving firewood more than 50 miles from where it was harvested to reduce the risk of spreading invasive pests. Moving firewood less than 10 miles from its origin is best. Learn more at mdc.mo.gov/firewood.



DID YOU KNOW?

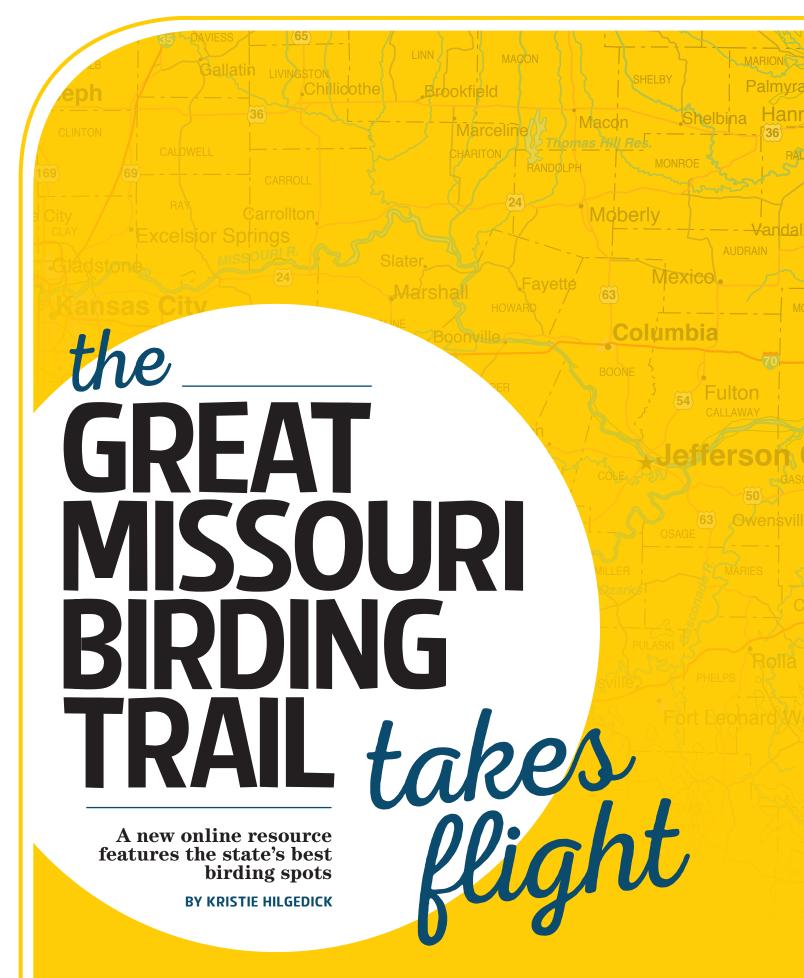
Conservation makes Missouri a great place to fish.

MDC Makes it Easy to Get Hooked on Fishing

Our cold- and warm-water hatcheries help keep fish plentiful in Missouri waters, and our online services make getting fishing permits and finding good places to fish easier than ever. Kids and families brand-new to fishing can learn angling basics through our Discover Nature — Fishing program. Check out these details:

- » MDC cold-water hatcheries stocked more than 1.3 million trout in 2016. These fish were distributed in four trout parks, 12 stream specialmanagement areas, and in Lake Taneycomo and 34 urban lakes.
- » MDC hatcheries stocked 3.2 million warm-water fish in 2016. Species stocked include hybrid striped bass, muskie, lake sturgeon, paddlefish, largemouth bass, hybrid sunfish, channel catfish, and walleye.
- » Buy permits from vendors by calling toll free 1-800-392-4115 or through the MO Fishing app. To buy fishing permits online for immediate printing and use, visit short.mdc.mo.gov/Z33.
- » Our free MO Fishing phone application helps you plan a successful fishing trip. Browse fishing reports for conditions at selected lakes, rivers, and trout parks across Missouri. Find MDC boat ramps on Missouri's major lakes, rivers, and streams, and see where MDC has established underwater fish structures that attract fish. With the geo-location feature, you can guide your boat to a fish attractor and start fishing. You can also view a fish identification guide and purchase and store your paperless fishing permit. For more information and to download the application, visit short.mdc.mo.gov/ZJZ.
- » Our Discover Nature Fishing program helps kids ages 7 to 15 and families gain the skills and confidence to go fishing on their own. Call your regional MDC office (find the phone number on Page 3) to learn when program classes are available in your area, or browse the Discover Nature — Fishing events calendar online at short.mdc.mo.gov/Z4y.







are out there — you just have to cross their path. But it's not guaranteed, and that's what makes it exciting."

Berger is one of 47 million bird watchers nationwide and one of 1.1 million birding Missourians, according to the 2011 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation. Whether you're a beginner birder or a seasoned veteran, knowing where to go is a must.

A partnership between the Missouri Bird Conservation Foundation and MDC seeks to provide just that through the creation of the Great Missouri Birding Trail.

WHAT IS A BIRDING TRAIL?

A birding trail is not a physical walking trail but a list or map of the best places to bird-watch in an area. Over 40 other states have birding trails that highlight prime bird-watching and wildlife-viewing locations.

The Great Missouri Birding Trail is online at greatmissouribirding**trail.com**. It provides an easy-to-use interactive map with the state's best places to bird. The site also provides information for beginners on basic gear and how to identify and help birds on their property. The trail is online and mobile-friendly for access anytime, anywhere.

"The Great Missouri Birding Trail encourages everyone to discover the excitement of birding in Missouri. Whether you're a newbie or oldschool, the trail offers something for everyone," said Sarah Kendrick, MDC state ornithologist.

The trail is divided into six regions: St. Louis, Central, Kansas City, Southwest, Southeast, and Northeast. The St. Louis and Kansas City regions also have metro trails, which feature places to bird close to the cities' centers, most of which are accessible by public transit.



remember the exact moment they fell in love with birds. One of Lisa Berger's earliest memories is crouching inside a hedge to hear white-eyed vireos twittering around her.

"I would imitate their songs," she recalled, noting she was 6 years old when she started toting her parents' binoculars so she could list and draw the birds she was seeing. Today, she frequently leads field trips for the Greater Ozarks Audubon Society.

Berger compared the hobby to a "grown-up Easter egg hunt."

"When you see a bird for the first time, and you get a good look at it in good light, it's spellbinding," she said.



Although the Great

Missouri Birding Trail is

not a physical walking

trail, signs like this one at

Bluffwoods Conservation

Area denote prime bird-

Each trail site on the map has a description highlighting the area's habitat, probable bird sightings, driving directions, and a link to the area's eBird page for reports of recent sightings and birding history.

HOW WAS THE TRAIL STARTED?

Mike Doyen of Rolla, president of Missouri Bird Conservation Foundation, founded the trail while working as the CEO of an executive search firm. He needed a hobby, so he turned to birding. After joining the local Audubon Society and

"TOGETHER WE **ARE BUILDING** MISSOURI BIRDERS WHILE HELPING TO IMPROVE BIRD Mike Doyen, president of Missouri **Bird Conservation** Foundation and founder of the Great Missouri Birding Trail

More than 1 million
Missourians are interested in
bird-watching, according to
the 2011 National Survey of
Fishing, Hunting, and WildlifeAssociated Recreation.

becoming very active, Mike was driven to find new ways to engage more people in bird watching and native habitat management.

"I worked to develop a conservation ethic in my community through a fundraising campaign and purchase of a local 70-acre nature center. My next challenge was to reach a broader audience," he said. "Out of this came the Great Missouri Birding Trail."

Knowing that birders need fuel to travel and drive by filling stations daily, Doyen approached Wallis Companies, owner of the Missouri-based On the Run convenience store franchise and big supporters of conservation. The Wallis family supported Doyen's idea and provided the funds to complete the first portion of the trail in the St. Louis region.

At about the same time, MDC's Wildlife Division was contemplating the same kind of trail project.

"I was really interested in starting a Missouri birding trail to spark more interest in bird watching," said Kendrick. "So I reached out to partner groups and agencies that may have a shared interest and soon discovered that Mike had already started one."

MDC approached Doyen, and by May 2015, a cooperative agreement was signed. Since that time, the trail has grown by leaps and bounds.

HOW WERE TRAIL SITES CHOSEN?

More than 190 sites were identified by experienced bird watchers affiliated with the Audubon Society



of Missouri (ASM) and MDC. The trail could not have been completed without the assistance of ASM birders, both Kendrick and Doyen said.

"Local birders live near the trail sites and bird them with some frequency in all seasons," he said. "This partnership was instrumental as we searched for the best sites across the state."

The locations were picked based on one overriding criterion — each represents high-quality native Missouri habitat. "If the habitat is right, the birds will be there," Doyen said.

MDC staff — working with Doyen and other birders — visited all of the

field locations, wrote the site descriptions, and edited the website.

"It's been a great partnership," Kendrick said. "We're both interested in getting people outdoors and exposing them to the beauty and diversity of birds and their habitats."

Doyen agreed.

"The Missouri Department of Conservation is an excellent partner," Doyen said. "We have the same goals and together we are building something special for Missouri birders while helping to improve bird habitat."

HABITAT IS KEY

The site also introduces new birders to Missouri's diverse habitats, which more than 350 species of birds use annually, whether year-round or during migration.

Nate Muenks, MDC's habitat management coordinator, said it's important that the conservation community keep an open dialogue and educate Missouri citizens about the vital role that habitat plays in species' survival.

While some species are generalists that may thrive in a number of different habitats, others are specialists that rely upon particular habitat characteristics to survive, he said.

"Grassland birds, for example, are the most rapidly declining group of birds in North America," he



Growing native plants, shrubs, and trees on your property provides cover and food sources for birds. Natives offer acorns and berries, and they support insects that use the vegetation.

explained. "If we continue to lose our native grasslands, we will continue to see declines in grassland wildlife. This includes birds like greater prairie-chickens, Henslow's sparrows, and eastern meadowlarks."

In addition to habitats, the site also promotes Missouri's public lands and encourages visitors to explore those sites. "The site is a wealth of information," Doyen said. "And we are continuously updating and adding new material."

NATIVE = BIRD-FRIENDLY

When Doyen started the trail, he wanted it to be more than a list of the best places to view birds in Missouri. It also had to function as an educational tool for bird conservation, including the importance of native plants and habitat.

Before people decide to plant native species, Doyen said it helps if they first harbor an appreciation for native habitats.



Celebrate the Great Missouri Birding Trail at Regional Launch Events

You're invited to help celebrate the completion of the Great Missouri Birding Trail. Seven regional launch events will be held to officially open the trail and celebrate its completion. A brief opening ceremony will be held, followed by short guided birding walks on each area. The first 25 attendees at each event will receive a Great Missouri Birding Trail tote bag or water bottle.

Great Missouri Birding Trail launch events will be held at the following locations from 9 a.m. to noon:

May 11 • Springfield Springfield Conservation Nature Center

May 12 • Rolla Audubon Trails Nature Center

May 17 • Kansas City Burr Oak Woods Conservation Nature Center

May 18 • St. Louis Powder Valley Conservation Nature Center

May 19 • Columbia Eagle Bluffs Conservation Area

May 24 • Kirksville MDC Northeast Regional Office

May 26 • Cape Girardeau Cape Girardeau Conservation Nature Center



"MDC has done more than anyone to save precious bird habitat across Missouri. Now it's our turn to join the fight. Imagine if 15 to 20 years from now, hundreds of thousands of privately owned backyards and back 40s are planted in native grasses, wildflowers, and trees. Plant native, grow native, and bring native Missouri back to your property," Doven said.

It's an idea Kendrick confirmed.

"We are so blessed in Missouri. Our state boasts some of the healthiest and most diverse native habitat in the Midwest, from prairie to wetland to Ozark forest. Migratory and resident birds really depend on these habitats to be maintained and kept top-notch."

Doyen believes most Missourians simply aren't aware of the implications nonnative species have for wildlife. If a plant is not native, it can be of minimal use to native wildlife. Healthy bird populations can't be sustained without healthy habitats, he said.

"With time and resources, I'm hopeful more people will begin to take bird habitat seriously. We have a lot of converts to the Grow Native! movement," he said. "Bird conservation starts at home."

NATURE'S GATEWAY HOBBY

River Bluffs Audubon Society member Rick Thom uses other states' birding trails to find high-quality natural communities when he travels out of state. He sees the same benefits in the Great Missouri Birding Trail.

"I think it's going to be a useful tool for both Missouri residents and visitors," Thom said.

He added people who are intrigued by birds often are curious about other topics, such as history, geology, flora, and nearby attractions. Each trail stop description includes a short list of cultural information about each birding area, Thom said.

"That cross-appreciation for an area's other features is a good thing," he said, explaining while one family member may be an avid birder, another may be a history buff.

Kendrick hopes bird-watching will serve as a gateway for Missouri residents and visitors to explore other aspects of the outdoors, develop a greater appreciation for nature, and spend quality time with friends and family.

"Birds are awesome, and they're so accessible. They can be found everywhere from urbanized settings to remote wildernesses, and no two birding trips are ever the same," she said. "The whole point of the trail is to encourage people, regardless of experience, to enjoy birds. It's never too early to start bird watching, and it's never too late to learn something new — so what's stopping you?" ▲



Ste. Gene

BLUE JAY

Birds in Missouri

Check out Birds in Missouri, available through the MDC Nature Shop at mdcnatureshop.com. This beautiful, full-color book features 354 illustrated species, including resident and migratory birds. It also includes range maps and seasonal abundance graphs. Seventeen two-page habitat scenes also portray Missouri's diverse natural and urban habitats. With this book and a pair of binoculars, you are ready to hit the trail.

Kristie Hilgedick serves on the Conservation Department's communications team. She enjoys traveling to new places and spending time outdoors.

Learning to coexist with bears is a rewarding challenge BY WYATT LAYMAN

F YOU WANT TO KNOW A SIXTH GRADER'S OPINION, JUST ASK. I'VE SPENT a lot of time over the last few years asking sixth graders how they feel about sharing their Missouri forests with bears. As you can imagine, it's rare for them to have a less than strong opinion about it. Even the ones who are too shy to speak up in front of their classmates will betray their opinion with their expression — eyes widen, mouths start to gape, brows furrow.





Sixth graders, like the rest of us, are just getting used to the idea that we have a bear population in the state of Missouri. And in the first five minutes of a school program, they grapple with what it means to live with bears until I give them a very simple answer: be aware.

The truth is they already know many of the concepts of being bear aware. They may have to think about it for

In some ways, the sixth graders have an advantage over the rest of us. They will grow up in a Missouri where bear sightings and a healthy bear population are just everyday facts. The rest of us will be like the old timers of today who can still remember when seeing a deer was frontpage news in certain rural parts of Missouri. Those of us who grew up without bears face the exciting challenge of learning how to coexist with them. Luckily for us, it's a rewarding challenge.



Bear Aware Biology

Laura Conlee, MDC's furbearer biologist, knows a thing or two about living with bears. She's spent the last eight years working directly with bears and, in many cases, the communities around those bears.

"The best way to coexist is to sometimes modify our own behaviors," said Conlee. "So there may be things that people need to do to be able to coexist with bears.

"For instance, you don't want to draw bears to your residence, and for a rural resident, that's very important. These bears are using really big forest blocks, and they may occasionally come across a house, and if they don't get food there, they're just going to keep going because there's plenty of food in the forest for them. But if they get there and trash is readily available or there's a lot of chicken feed sitting out that they can get at, then they're going to take advantage of that."

Conlee explains that one of the most challenging things about keeping bears from becoming a nuisance is their memory.

"Bears can learn something almost instantaneously and remember it. They have a really good memory, and they're going to come back and revisit it again and again. And bears need to learn something just once. They generally don't forget it, and if it's a female, they pass it along

to their young."

So how do we make sure the intelligence of such a smart animal doesn't cause conflict with residents?

"The key is to learn quicker than the bear," said Conlee. "So if you notice that a bear has gotten into something, remedy it immediately."

Conlee also stresses prevention over reaction, and respect over fear.

"Our baseline reaction to bears shouldn't be fear. Missourians should be proud of the bear population in the state and their success story. They've rebounded from nearly nonexistent numbers to a healthy and growing population. We just need to be mindful that our actions have direct impacts on these animals."

For Conlee, it comes down to learning to live with an animal in the same way that we've learned to live with other animals in the state.

A Landowner's Perspective

Rebecca Isaacs also knows something about what it means to live with bears. She and her family have been doing it for about 15 years.

"We probably started having bears around our house 15 years ago," said Isaacs. "And then probably about 10 to 12 years ago was when we noticed the population increase.

At that time we had cattle, so we had grain in our barn. We didn't keep it secured or anything, we just stacked it on pallets. So the bears would come to the grain."

When asked about the changes she and her family made to coexist with bears, she echoed Conlee and said the changes were relatively simple and easy.

"We had to learn to secure the smell of the grain by keeping it in an enclosed part of the barn," said Isaacs. "We dispose of our trash promptly. We took down the automatic dog feeder.

"And we haven't seen a bear at our house in a long time after making those changes."

These new habits didn't just help with their bear population. It reduced their raccoon and opossum problems.

The Isaacs family loves to be outdoors and spends a lot of time hiking, horseback riding, and four-wheeling across their Ozarks property. So learning to live with bears at home was only part of the acclimation — they also changed some of their habits in the field.

"In our deer stands, if we leave even a cracker package, they will find it," said Isaacs. "As we changed our habits of having open food, we had fewer problems. Not just at home, but also in our deer stands. You don't leave food behind, you don't leave wrappers, and you don't leave trash. And even though we weren't feeding them, they were attracted to that food."

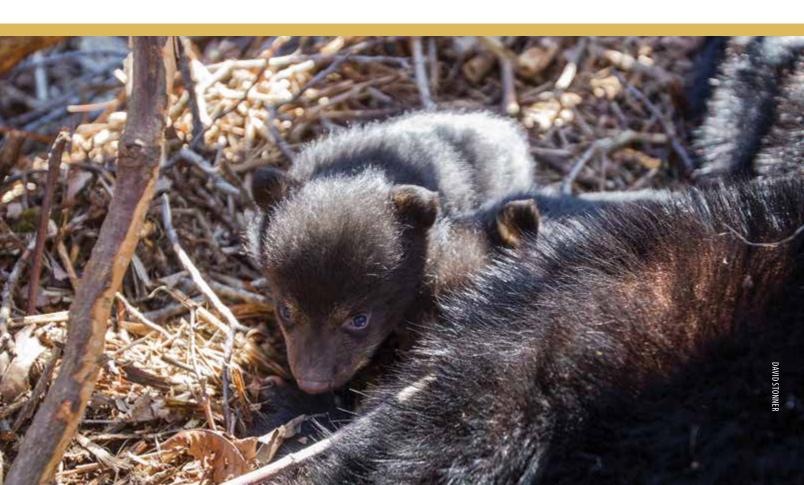
Isaacs says the changes have been rewarding. She and her family have participated in den studies and trapping activities to help MDC learn more about bear population in the state. They thoroughly enjoy sharing their property with black bears.

"Once we changed things so they're not on our back porch, it was great. Walking out and seeing one on your porch is a little intimidating. So when we made those changes and we began seeing the bears out on the property, it was cool to be sitting out there or four-wheeling through the property and see a female and her two cubs."

Bears require respect from us. This respect is rewarded with unforgettable opportunities to view an incredible animal in a landscape where it was once an everyday feature.

Whether you're a sixth grader, a bear biologist, or a landowner, the general consensus seems to be the same — bears are pretty cool and so is having them in Missouri. So as we all learn together what it means to live with bears, don't forget to enjoy them. If you have the pleasure of seeing a bear from a safe distance, make sure you savor the moment. It won't be one you soon forget.

Wyatt Layman is a naturalist from Shannon County in the Ozark Region. He enjoys early mornings on the water and late nights in a campsite.





If You Encounter a Bear Up Close

- Never corner a bear make sure it has an escape route.
- Back away from a bear slowly with your arms raised.
- Speak in a calm, loud voice.
- Do not turn your back to a bear.
- Walk away slowly DO NOT RUN.
- Bear spray, a form of pepper spray, is a very effective tool if a bear is within 10 yards of you.

Around Home

Never feed a bear on purpose or accidentally. A
bear that has gotten used to getting food from
humans may become aggressive and dangerous.
When this happens, the bear must be destroyed.

A fed bear is a dead bear

- Don't leave pet food sitting outside. Feed pets a portion they'll eat at each meal and remove the empty containers.
- Store garbage, recyclables, and compost inside a secure building or in a bear-proof container until the day of trash pick-up.
- Keep grills and smokers clean and store them inside.
- In bear country, keep bird-feeding areas clean of seed husk piles and hang feeders at least 10 feet high and 4 feet away from any structure to keep bears from accessing/reaching the seed.

Around Camp or in the Field

• Make noise so you don't surprise a bear — clap, sing, or talk loudly. Travel in a group if possible.

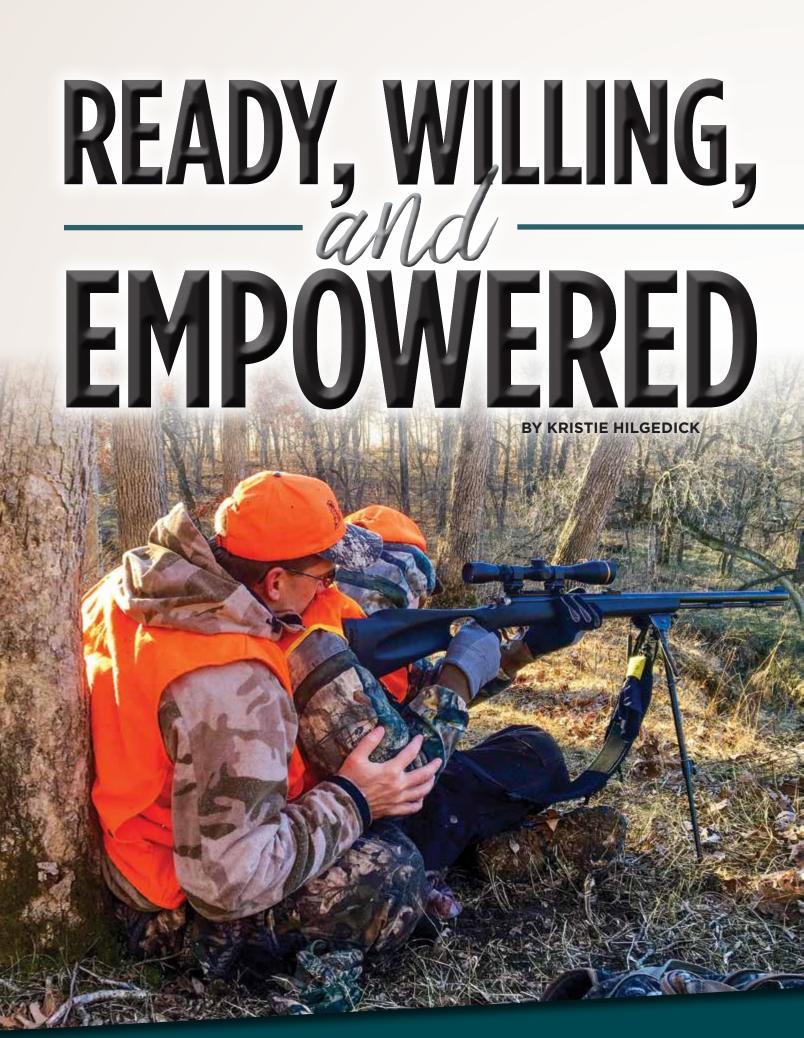
• Pay attention to your surroundings and watch for bear sign, such as tracks or claw or bite marks on trees.

- Keep dogs leashed.
- If you see a bear, leave it alone. Do not approach it. Make sure it has an escape route.

How to Set Up a Bear Aware Campsite

- Choose a place to camp away from animal trails, berry patches, and fresh bear sign (tracks, scat, clawed-up trees).
- Place your tent upwind and at least 100 yards away from cooking and food storage areas.
- Keep a clean camp. Wash and put away pots and utensils after you are done using them. Wipe off picnic tables. Pick up any scraps of food that you drop.
- Change into clean clothes before bed. Store the clothes that you wore while cooking in a bear-proof container along with other smelly items.
- Store smelly items away from your tent and cooking area. Place them inside a vehicle with the windows rolled up, in a bear-proof canister, or hung in a bag from a branch at least 10 feet high and 5 feet away from the trunk.





Missourians with disabilities go afield with adaptive gear and a little help from their friends



At the age of 10, Sam was able to harvest his first deer.

LTHOUGH VISUALLY IMPAIRED, 15-year-old Sam Doman has at least one advantage over other deer hunters: he can sometimes smell a herd before others can see it.

"Their musk glands can smell pretty strong," he explained.

Despite being able to perceive only light, Sam likely goes hunting as often as any other student in his class.

Using a special riflescope, he and his father, Randy Doman, have worked out a system allowing them to hunt in tandem. Sitting closely behind Sam, Randy is able to see through the scope without pressing his own eye socket against it. To target the quarry, he either tells Sam where to aim the firearm or adjusts his shoulders.

Sam squeezes the trigger.

"We've done it countless times and it's been successful," said Sam, noting that participating in these annual fall rites means a lot to him. "There are tons of kids who go hunting. It's a great thing to be able to talk about it, just like everyone else."

For the Doman family, hunting and fishing are longstanding traditions. Randy wanted to pass those traditions on to his son.

Until recently, it didn't seem possible for someone with Sam's disability to fire a rifle. But that's changing as more adaptive equipment like Sam's special scope comes to market.



Sam Doman takes aim with his EOTech gun sight and the assistance of his father.

Adaptive Gear Can Make Dreams Come True

Sam got an early start in life pursuing his passion. But for Patty Hayne, achieving her dream came later.

Now 63, Patty was 14 months old when she fell into a fire pit. Her burns were so severe that surgeons amputated her right hand at the wrist and limited the use of her left hand.

Patty grew up in a family that loved the outdoors.

"It was always one of my secret desires to hang out with the guys," she said. "Unfortunately, I had to put my dreams up on a shelf."

That longing never left her.

And so when Ozark Prosthetics approached her with their interest in adapting hunting equipment for people with disabilities, she was intrigued. The National Wild Turkey Federation also wanted to help, as did the staff at the Andy Dalton Shooting Range and Outdoor Education Center northwest of Springfield.

The idea was if adaptations could be found for Patty's severe disability, they could be found for anyone's.

She purchased her own shotgun. Staff at Ozark Prosthetics fashioned a mold around the end of her remaining arm, attaching the firearm to Patty's limb with a quick-release mechanism. A strap around her elbow and shoulder supported it.

Finally, in the fall of 2004, Patty aimed and fired a gun for the first time in her life.

"It was like the whole world opened up," she said. "It was so empowering.



A Day at the Range Celebrates Access

Andy Dalton Shooting Range and Outdoor Education Center recognizes the new opportunities technological advances are creating for people with physical limitations with its annual A Day at the Range event.

Now in its 15th year, A Day at the Range draws approximately 1,200 participants, mostly people with disabilities and caregivers, from Missouri and nearby states. This year's event is scheduled for Sept. 9.

"When we first started this, we had no idea the kind of need there is in the community," said Outdoor Education Center Manager Mike Brooks.

At the event, volunteers help visitors shoot rifles and bows, go fishing, and learn about Missouri wildlife. It's also a chance for visitors to learn more about the adaptive equipment that's available. For example, users of some power wheelchairs can't manipulate their hands, but they can use a puff of breath to aim and fire a gun.

"We can accommodate any kind of disability. Our business is to help people connect with the outdoors." Brooks said.

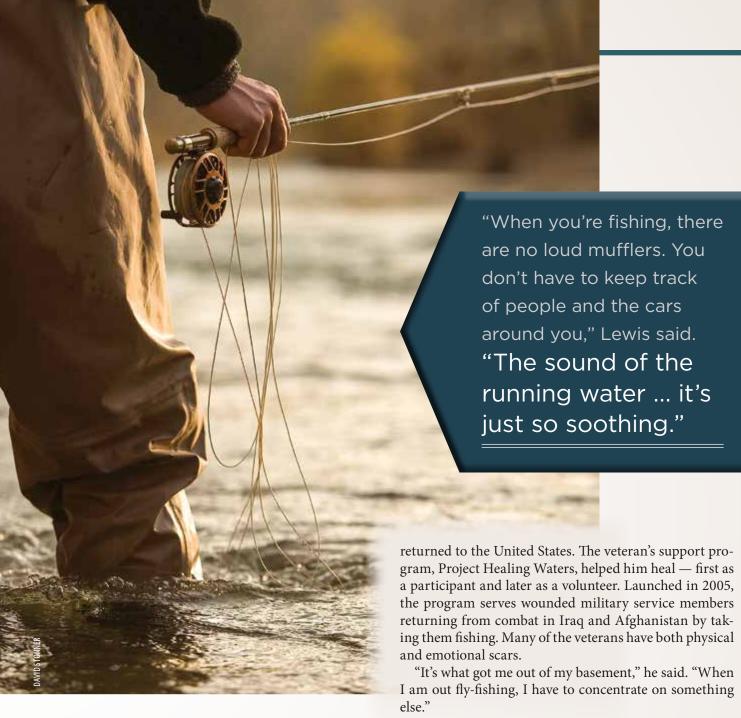
All five MDC shooting range and outdoor education centers are accessible to people with disabilities. Browse the ranges and their event schedules at **short.mdc.mo.gov/ZZF**.



I felt like I could climb mountains."

It was only the start for Patty, who harvested her first turkey in 2005.

"Sometimes all it takes is for someone else to recognize you have a dream and to extend a helping hand," she said. "You've just got to test the boundaries."



Veterans Find Healing in Fly-Fishing

For St. Louis resident Lewis Haynes, fishing helped him reach beyond some of the difficult boundaries life has set before him.

Suffering from debilitating anxiety, Lewis — a former veteran of the Gulf War and Operation Iraqi Freedom — finally found the peace he needed to heal in fly-fishing.

"When you're fishing, there are no loud mufflers. You don't have to keep track of the people and the cars around you," Lewis said. "The sound of the running water ... it's just so soothing."

Medically retired after more than 23 years of military service, Lewis was burdened by survivor's guilt when he Lewis said combat veterans, while fishing, will often find one another to discuss the traumatic events they experienced and witnessed overseas.

"None of us are doctors, but we can help one another," Lewis explained.

MDC helps support Project Healing Waters and other veteran organizations by waiving fishing permit fees, providing adaptive fishing equipment for people with disabilities, and partnering to help organize Veterans Day Fishing events.

"We want everyone to enjoy the benefits of fishing. It lowers your blood pressure. Well, until you hook a fish!" said Andrew Branson, fisheries program specialist with MDC.



MDC is Committed to Universal Access

MDC follows the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), a law that has considerably improved opportunities for people with disabilities.

"On MDC's projects, our goal is to maintain compliance with current ADA Accessibility Guidelines," MDC Architect Jon Thompson said. "MDC, like all public entities, must monitor the evolution of accessible guidelines and work to understand and maintain compliance."

A small change can make a big difference for those who are impacted by disability, he said.

For example, hoisting a fishing pole over a waist-high railing is often a problem for wheelchair users. But by lowering the railing for a narrow stretch, a dock can be made accessible and still remain safe for small children.

MDC has been diligent in making sure the newly constructed Busch Shooting Range is accessible to all visitors. Once the building is complete this fall, range staffers will be able to communicate with deaf shooters using visual cues.

In a variety of ways, MDC is committed to making its programs, services, and outdoor resources accessible to everyone.







➤ Track Chairs

MDC has a limited number of donated track chairs, a type of motorized wheelchair featuring rubberized stability tracks that makes it possible for the rider to traverse all kinds of outdoor terrain.

MDC's 14 track chairs make it easier than ever for wheelchair-bound people to get out in the field and explore the outdoors. Although not available for individual check-out, the chairs are available for use at events organized by MDC or by MDC partner organizations.

"Our chairs have been all over the state," said Kyle Lairmore, MDC shooting range coordinator. "They are very versatile tools, capable of rolling over small trees and brush. They really do get some use."

To find out how to reserve the chairs, call your regional office (numbers listed on Page 3).



➤ Managed Deer Hunts

Throughout the fall, Missouri offers numerous managed deer hunts for archery, crossbow, muzzleloading, and modern firearms.

However, any hunter who is permanently disabled and requires a wheelchair to move freely is automatically allowed to participate in one or more managed deer hunts at five areas, including August A. Busch Memorial Conservation Area (CA), Burr Oak Woods CA, Caney Mountain CA, Peck Ranch CA, and James A. Reed Memorial Wildlife Area.

"Hunters with disabilities are guaranteed a minimum of one hunt, and many participate in multiple managed hunts," noted Nathan Bess, permit services supervisor.

"Just because people have a disability, doesn't mean they shouldn't enjoy the outdoors," Bess said.

The deadline to apply is July 31. To participate, look for more information at **short.mdc.mo.gov/ZkC**.

➤ Accessible Waterfowl Blinds

MDC has several hunting blinds for waterfowl available to disabled hunters in most of Missouri's intensively managed waterfowl-hunting areas. To learn how to reserve one, visit **short.mdc.mo.gov/Z4e**.

➤ Hunting Medical Exemptions

For hunters with mobility and sight issues, Missouri offers a medical exemption allowing them to hunt from a stationary vehicle. A physician's approval is necessary to procure this exemption. To obtain the form to apply for a medical exemption, visit **short.mdc.mo.gov/Z39**.

➤ Permit Waivers

Physical limitations aren't the only impediments people with disabilities face. Costs of pursuing a new hobby can be a barrier, too.



To make fishing more affordable, MDC waives the expense of obtaining fishing permits for certain disabilities. The following Missouri residents qualify for the exemption:

- Those who meet the definition of being legally blind.
- Those who are permanently disabled and require wheelchairs to move freely.
- Those with cerebral palsy or a mental disorder or illness who are so severely disabled that they cannot fish alone. (They must be accompanied by a licensed adult angler.)
- Any resident or nonresident honorably discharged veteran who has a service-related disability of 60 percent or greater, or who was a prisoner of war during military service.
- Any member of the U.S. military currently assigned as a patient to a Warrior Transition Brigade, Warrior Transition Unit, or a military medical center.

Remember that daily trout tags and trout permits must be purchased when and where required. To learn more about the details of these exemptions, read *A Summary of Missouri Fishing Regulations*, available online or wherever permits are sold, or go to **short.mdc.mo.gov/Z3C**.

➤ Specialized Loaner Fishing Equipment

MDC also loans out specialized fishing equipment, such as spring-loaded fishing rods, which allow anglers to cast without using any swinging force of the arm. To find more information, contact your MDC regional office (see phone numbers on Page 3).

➤ Trout Parks

Supported by on-site hatcheries, Missouri's four trout parks feature high-quality trout fishing on cold-water streams. Maramec Spring Park, Bennett Spring State Park, Montauk State Park, and Roaring River State Park all have designated-disabled accessible areas — either a jetty, platform, or pier that allows anglers to cast into good fishing locations.

Although these areas are not set-aside exclusively for people with disabilities, most able-bodied anglers will courteously move out of the way.

Kristie Hilgedick serves on MDC's communications team. She enjoys traveling to new places and spending time outdoors.



This ramp at Bennett Springs, made possible through donations by the Missouri Conservation Heritage Foundation and other businesses, makes fishing accessible to all Missourians.

Find Accessible Areas Near You

Visit **mdc.mo.gov/atlas** or order your copy of *Disabled-Accessible Outdoors*. This 68-page guidebook features information about MDC public areas — trails, fishing areas, ranges, etc. — that feature at least three disabled-accessible amenities. To request a free copy, write to **pubstaff@mdc.mo.gov** or call 573-751-4115, ext. 3630.





Common Snapping Turtle

AFTER FINISHING A sunrise wildflower photo session at Taberville Prairie Conservation Area north of El Dorado Springs, I noticed what I thought was a basketball-sized clump of grass walking along the side of the road. I put the truck in reverse to get a better look and realized the muddy clump of "grass" was actually a common snapping turtle.

I pulled off the gravel road and grabbed my camera and the 100–400mm lens I had been using to photograph songbirds on the prairie. The turtle took very little notice of me, pausing for only a moment before continuing to amble into the prairie grass. I stayed back with my long lens so as not to cause it any undue stress.

Common snapping turtles (*Chelydra serpentina*) are distinctive creatures. These aquatic turtles have a large, pointy head, a thick tail, and a smooth shell and are common throughout the state. They are easy to tell apart from the rare and protected alligator snapping turtle by the lack of three large ridges on the top of the shell. The shell itself can be up to 14 inches in length, and the turtle can weigh up to 35 pounds. They are usually found in farm ponds, marshy areas, and rivers. I saw this one near a muddy seep at the headwaters of the Baker Branch Creek on Taberville Prairie.

They don't spend much time on land, and the females only travel to lay eggs. Females will dig a nest in deep sand or loose soil, and lay 20–30 eggs, typically in June. These hatch 55–125 days later, depending on environmental conditions. Over 80 percent of common snapping turtles' nests are destroyed by predators, including skunks, raccoons, and mink.

Common snapping turtles tend to eat insects, crayfish, fish, snails, earthworms, amphibians, snakes, small mammals, birds, and carrion. They are an economically important game animal in Missouri, and are prized for their meat for stews and soups. Studies show they don't harm game fish or waterfowl populations, but they can cause trouble in small, artificial ponds.

To harvest a common snapping turtle, you must have a fishing permit, and it would be wise to look up a few photos to make sure it is not an alligator snapping turtle.

—Story and photograph by David Stonner

100-400mm lens • f/8 • 1/400 sec • ISO 400

We help people discover nature through our online Field Guide. Visit mdc.mo.gov/field-guide to learn more about Missouri's plants and animals.







Wah'Kon-Tah Prairie

This gorgeous area features a sweeping 3,000 acres of tallgrass prairie, including 1,800 acres of prairie that have never been plowed.

WAH'KON-TAH PRAIRIE IS a 3,030-acre tallgrass prairie that straddles Cedar and St. Clair counties. It was named in honor of the Osage tribe of Native Americans that lived in this area of the Osage Plains in large numbers prior to European settlement. Wah'Kon-Tah means great spirit or great mystery.

Mid-Iune is one of the best times to visit prairies in Missouri, and Wah'Kon-Tah is no exception. During a walk at daybreak or resting atop a high spot, you will see rare grassland birds vocalizing and displaying their breeding plumage, large fields of blooming wildflowers, and an abundance of prairie insects. It's also a nice time to explore the prairie headwater streams where you can find pools with small fish and amphibians.

Roughly 1,800 of the 3,030 acres are native remnant tallgrass prairie, which have never been heavily disturbed or converted to another land use. These areas contain well over 200 species of native prairie plants. Area staff are working to restore the other 1,300 acres to native prairie conditions by planting seed collected from the remnant portions of the prairie.

Wah'Kon-Tah Prairie is in the transition zone of the tallgrass prairies of the Osage Plains and the woodlands of the Ozark Highlands. Because of this unique juxtaposition, there are pockets of savanna and woodland along the boundaries of the area.

The management goal for Wah'Kon-Tah Prairie is to provide the proper habitat for all species that depend on the area to survive. Although the landscape is very different than it was before European settlement, staff use processes such as burning and grazing that



16-35mm lens • f/11 • 1/125 sec • ISO 100 | by David Stonner

historically shaped the prairie vegetation, prevented encroachment of trees, and provided a variety of habitat for prairie plants and animals. Each type of management, including purposefully leaving idle areas, is done in small chunks scattered across the area. The result is a mosaic of different habitats, which is very important for species, such as greater prairie-chickens, that require varied accommodations throughout the year.

Other prairie species that call Wah'Kon-Tah home are the regal fritillary butterfly, northern crayfish frog, Henslow's sparrow, pink katydid, short-eared owl, pale purple coneflowers, prairie violets, and many more.

-Matt Hill, area manager



Wah'Kon-Tah Prairie

Recreation Opportunities: Bird watching, wildlife viewing, nature photography

Unique Features: Native tallgrass prairie, unplowed prairie

For More Information: Call 417-876-5226 or visit short.mdc.mo.gov/Zwd



To find more events near you, call your regional office (phone numbers on Page 3), or visit **mdc.mo.gov** and choose your region.

FLY-FISHING

MAY 12 • FRIDAY • 6-8:30 P.M. OR MAY 13 • SATURDAY • 9-11 A.M.

Southeast Region, Cape Girardeau
Conservation Nature Center, 2289 County
Park Drive, Cape Girardeau, MO 63701
Registration required,
call 573-290-5218 beginning May 2
Ages 16 and older
Learn the basics of fly-fishing or pick up
a few new technical skills. We'll cover
equipment selection and use, reading the
water, matching the hatch, fly-casting, fishing
techniques, and essential knots. Fly-fishing
equipment available for loan.

WILD EDIBLES

MAY 13 • SATURDAY • 10 A.M.—NOON

Ozark Region, Shepherd of the Hills
Fish Hatchery, 483 Hatchery Road,
Branson, MO 65616
Registration required,
call 417-334-4865, ext. 0 by May 11
Families, ages 12 and older
This short outdoor hike will introduce you to many of our native plants that are edible or have medicinal uses. We will teach you proper collection techniques and ethics.
There will also be a few items for you to sample. Dress for the weather. Bring a bottle of water and bug spray.

DISCOVER NATURE — FAMILIES: FREE SHOOTING DAY

MAY 14 • SUNDAY • 9 A.M.-4:30 P.M.

Southwest Region, Andy Dalton Shooting Range and Outdoor Education Center, 4859 N. Farm Road 61, Ash Grove, MO 65604 No registration required,

call 417-742-4361 for more information Families

In honor of all mothers on their special day, enjoy one free hour or round of trap or skeet shooting on us. All range rules apply.

BASIC ARCHERY FOR FAMILIES

equipment will be provided.

MAY 18 • THURSDAY • 5:30-8 P.M.

Central Region, MDC Central Regional Office, 3500 East Gans Road, Columbia, MO 65201 Registration required, call 573-815-7901, ext. 2867 All ages, families; children younger than 16 must be accompanied by an adult Learn the basics of archery safety, shooting techniques, equipment, target shooting, and much more. The program will consist of a brief classroom lesson, followed by a mentored shooting experience. All



MAY 20 • SATURDAY • 10 A.M.-2:30 P.M.

IDEAS FOR

FAMILY

FUN

Kansas City Region, Anita B. Gorman Discovery Center, 4750 Troost Ave, Kansas City, MO 64110 No registration required All ages

Join us to learn about the different species of Missouri fish and where to find them. You can also practice your knot-tying skills so the big one doesn't get away next time.

WOMEN'S BEGINNING TRAPSHOOTING

MAY 25 • THURSDAY • 6 -9 P.M.

St. Louis Region, Jay Henges Shooting Range, 1100 Antire Road, High Ridge, MO 63049 Registration required,

call 636-938-9548 beginning May 11
Ages 16 and older, experienced shooters only
Join us as we learn the basics of trapshooting.
Topics include appropriate guns, ammunition, rules, and etiquette. We'll have hands-on practice then shoot a round of trap for fun.
Firearms, ammunition, and safety equipment will be provided.

PRIMITIVE SKILLS DAY

JUNE 10 • SATURDAY • 10 A.M.-4 P.M.

and campfire cooking.

Central Region, MDC Central Regional Office, 3500 East Gans Road, Columbia, MO 65201 Registration required, call 573-815-7901, ext. 2867 All ages, families, children younger than 16 must be accompanied by an adult From hunting to camping, learn to incorporate primitive techniques to make your next adventure in the outdoors more successful. Activities will include atlatl, archery, fire making, cordage, muzzle loading, wildlife ID,



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I Am Conservation

Aaron and Tracy Twombly call their 92-acre Johnson County property Harmony. The couple met in college and discovered a mutual appreciation of nature. Aaron had long fostered a dream to own some land that would allow him to grow and nurture a forest of hardwood trees. As a child, Aaron grew up learning to do woodworking with his grandfather, and he wanted land that would help him restore resources he used in his woodworking. "Planting trees and seeing them grow helps me to slow down and consider the bigger picture of life," said Aaron. The property, which the Twomblys purchased in 2013, runs along Little Blackwater Creek, and, despite the couple's lengthy list of criteria for the perfect property, the couple said Harmony exceeded their expectations with its diverse landscapes. With very little equipment, the couple has worked with family and friends to reforest bottomland along the creek to stabilize the bank, restore fescue fields to native prairie, and convert former soybean fields to prairie and savanna. They work diligently to control invasive species, and they have formed a stream team to monitor Little Blackwater Creek. "I'm most excited about our recent enrollment in MRAP (Missouri Outdoor Recreational Access Program, **short.mdc.mo.gov/Zwh**). I hope others may be inspired to nurture their own piece of property, whether it's a patio container or the back 40," said Tracy. —photograph by Noppadol Paothong